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ABSTRACT

The issue of professional women in academia is attracting increasing attention in the literature. A female psychologist, who was the only woman faculty member in a 35-member psychology department for three years, personally experienced and identified issues such as tokenism, isolation, representativeness, exploitation, family and occupational roles, and power within the university vis-a-vis tenure, promotion and grants. Subsequently, a training program for young psychologists was developed using role plays, simulations and didactic inputs to counteract sexual stereotyping by promoting careful application by leadership and organizational principles. The problem of defining an appropriate female power model suggests that new behaviors taught to women need supportive contexts in the form of networking. (Author/KMF)

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The Token Ineffectual:[1]

The Woman in Academe

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The Token Ineffectual: The Woman in Academe

Although there are some very successful academic psychologists who happen to be women I will be speaking today on some of the difficulties a woman faces when joining a university faculty. Such a topic might be disapproved by the notable women in psychology.

Highly successful women in the sciences sometimes display evidence of separating themselves from the rest of womankind. One group of well established female scientists insisted, when interviewed, that they had gotten where they were solely through personal hard work, and that men faced the same obstacles as they did in achieving success. Horatio Alger reborn as Henrietta. The Horatio Alger Myth is just that. What successful women sometimes fail to consider is that they have either:

1. eschewed typical feminine roles, i.e., wife and mother, in order to get ahead
2. relied on other lower status women to do those jobs for them
3. or been exceptional, outstanding women.

We haven't reached equity when only exceptional superwomen occupy roles that are in the main populated by mediocre men.

My particular topic is the woman in academia. This topic is attracting increasing attention in the literature. I will speak today from a somewhat more personalized view. It was my good fortune to be the only woman faculty member in a 35 member psychology department for three years. The experience crystallized

some relatively vague feelings about what it means to be female in a male dominated environment. There were some other women in other departments of the university. Not many, so we slowly became friends through seminars, lunches, and shared committee assignments (most committees need women). The observations I will share with you today are drawn from my own experience, and the observations I gathered from twenty or so other female professors. In addition I will briefly describe a training unit I developed for advanced psychology graduate students based on my interpretations of the social psychology literature concerning power and leadership assumption. Finally, the effects of the training will be provided.

To be the only woman or one of a very few women on a faculty places the woman in the role of token. To be a token is to be marginal, a representative of all women, segregated, stereotyped, and exploited.

Let me expand on some of these concommitants of tokenism. This giant victory that women have won! Being the only one of anything; woman, black, hispanic, or other, means that you are at least initially out of of the mainstream of the social life of the host group. Being different in America has always meant being isolated. Some high level administrators in education have admitted not hiring women because of the home problems that late night working with women would cause at home. Some of the same reluctance to engage with the new "woman" on the faculty is probably due to the same reasoning. Every woman professor I've known has reported being invited to the faculty wives' club soon after their arrival on campus. All rejected the invitation

with some huffiness (I did too). In thinking over the paths toward influence and power in academic settings as I now see them, some groundwork and reassurance to the women indirectly involved with the faculty (i.e. wives) may be a good idea. Sexism and sexuality are thus intertwined.

In addition to the personal loneliness that this segregation from the mainstream of social life engenders, it also means limited or no access to the casual informal networks that so quickly encompass new male faculty--golf games, tennis, beers, and so on. I have an amusing example. When the ongoing doubles group on my faculty needed a new fourth, they invited my husband. No one even inquired as to my tennis prowess. Wouldn't it seem strange in our present culture to bypass the male colleague to invite his wife into an activity peopled by the husband's professional associates? It did not seem strange to anyone. Or when I inquired about our faculty-student softball team I was immediately referred to a graduate student's wife who was trying to get a team going. I didn't even get an audition.

Now you might ask, what does tennis and softball have to do with gaining influence and power in an academic career? Maybe nothing, or maybe a lot. Current research indicates to me that informal contacts, mentors, and friends are important contributors to gaining status within an organization. Can you think of how many of your journal articles or grant proposals were born during discussions over coffee or after a game. I have even observed two male faculty members at another university talking about grant collaboration at a little league football game (while their wives

kept up with the younger children). How many important committee assignments are decided based on simple familiarity and confidence in the person.

The burden of representativeness is probably the heaviest that the token bears. How unfair it is to stand for all women! But, when no other women are around you are the best approximation as to how "women" behave. Tokens report feeling self-conscious about their behaviors. If they talk a lot they worry about being seen as a chatterbox. If they are quiet they are afraid of seeming passive, and too compliant. It is very easy to say, "Be yourself." It is harder to do when you realize that others do not see you as just you. Even positive feedback about your role model characteristics (and we all know now how important role models are) is a little scary. What if a woman comes back and slurs a word and laughs too loud after a glass of wine at lunch. Surely a few male faculty members have done as much. I can imagine the appraisal, "She is breaking under the strain of being a woman on this faculty." Every faculty has good teachers, bad teachers, publishers, non publishers, and so on. That is okay since we come to realize on psychology faculties that all men are not good teachers, but some are. Some men publish, but others do not. This freedom is given to the males among us simply because a critical mass exists for each man to stand for himself. Sex is not the only discriminating variable. I've heard students complain about behaviorists, or dogmatically dynamically oriented professors as if they had experienced the universe of such people in the

person of one. Sex, however, is a variable which is status laden in our culture. It is lower status to be a woman. Status and power are closely related. Behaviorists have high status in at least a few departments.

Exploitation is another issue. Every committee looks better if there is a minority member. Although women are scarce they are more plentiful than blacks or hispanics, or native american indians. Some committees will not be approved without an minority member. This is especially true of faculty search committees. Whereas senior professors will advise new people to "lock your door and write" new women find their mailboxes piled with directives to be on various departmental and university level committees. This is a complex issue in terms of gaining power. Some committee exposure is good for the woman. Too much committee takes time away from scholarly work with consequent tenure and promotion problems. Many of the women I surveyed said that they were not told that their committee hours would not be rewarded. University service at most universities is not seen as proof of scholarship. Everyone who has been there for a while knows that. Why doesn't someone tell women who tend to be in the greatest demand.

Another angle on committee work is the potential for making changes in the University that would allow for the hiring of more women. Hiring is an important first step. It seemed to me and to others I've spoken with that the credibility of the search process was quite variable. Thus making the time commitment risky in terms of change potential. Here's the range I personally

encountered. 1. After appointment to the committee I heard nothing until I received the schedule-for-the-day of the candidate. I was not even on the schedule. 2. I labored for hours, probably about 80 or 90 hours, reviewing vitae only to discover that the program faculty had vetoe powers and that the rankings of the committee had for the most part been ignored. 3. And finally, there were committees where democracy prevailed. Fair national searches were accomplished. My input was sought, and apparently valued. (Let me add parenthetically that of the 3 committees I served in which followed (3)- 2 resulted in hiring a woman- all three at least invited a woman).

These descriptions meshed with the experience of other women and other men. The hiring of new faculty is often in the hands of powerful, tenured professors. Almost all of these are men. Of course there were many, many other committees that wanted more of the scarce women. Women began to refuse all cross departmental assignments because they were in such demand at their own department.

Tokens sometimes have high visibility along with their low power. This involves them in more counseling of female graduate students. Although I think that counseling female graduate students is a very worthwhile way to spend time, I am aware that; 1. it is time taken away from tasks that will increase status, and 2. it is nonstrategic to encourage female graduate students to form their major professor ties with underpowered faculty.

Another issue that women professionals face especially is that they judge themselves and are judged according to how well

they combine occupation and family centered roles. They find themselves in academe, which has been described by sociologists as a job for the "family free man." That is, a job that demands long uninterrupted times to write and reflect, travel to professional meetings, strategic career moves, and close relationships with graduate students of both sexes. A wonderful dean I once served under told his new faculty that success at his university demanded 80 hours a week of work. He himself devoted far more than 80 hours. He also had a wife that filled his desk drawer with lunch and snacks, cleaned his home, cooked his meals, and so on. She would laughingly report that he had never changed a diaper or fed either of their two daughters. Women faced with this job tend, however, as attribution research has suggested, not to see the job demands as unreasonable, but themselves as unworthy. There is only one right way to be in academe. And women, who are not family free, have difficulty meshing the demands from the two systems.

(Critical tenure years for both male and female professors tend to fall during the professional woman's optimal childbearing years, 26-33. Yet the rules are inflexible concerning years toward tenure, even though having children is good for future enrollments.)

In summary, how do we get power within the university: tenure, promotion, grants, students and publications. Women at universities report that 1) their nurturance and guidance of other women will not give them tenure or promotion; 2) their exclusion from informal networks or troubled access to such

networks makes some of the above activities difficult; 3) their typically divided loyalties between human and task concerns can interfere with accomplishing the above activities; 4) their typically divided loyalties between family and career can interfere with the above power facilitators; 5) their behavior (like men's behaviors) is shaped by their organizational contexts; non-supportive contexts can decrease productivity.

One woman reported a faculty development plan being implemented at her university. It involved many elaborate ways to link younger and older colleagues, seminars, etc. It all seemed wonderful until she realized that the powerful men in her department felt that anyone who needed that much help didn't deserve to stay on the faculty.

The picture I have painted thus far seems gloomy. There are variables quite apart from the individual characteristics of the woman that affect her attempts to gain influence on a university faculty. I believed, however, that we had learned enough through psychological research to have an effect on status variables. Personal modification of behavior is one strategy. There is an enormous psychological literature devoted to leadership and power concerns. Though most of this is based on white college or military males, some of the laboratory generated insights may hold promise for increasing personal power among women in academe. For example, eye contact, initiating remarks, open relaxed bodily postures, verbalizations aimed at the whole group, and sitting at the head of a table are all simple behavioral tendencies of people who are seen as leaders. These

seemed so simple and well known that I did not think to tell my graduate student psychologists about them. Until, that is, I began to hear rumblings from the externship sites. Supervisor ratings of these young psychologists were markedly different by sex of trainee. On one 36 item skills checklist, males scored significantly higher on 29 of the skills. This puzzled me because there really was not much difference among the students in terms of age, experience, prior degrees, intellectual skills, and so on. In addition to the numerical differences, the supervisors tended to include something negative about the woman trainee in their responses to the open ended evaluation questions. For example, women were called brusque, dependent, aggressive and passive, headstrong or too compliant. It seemed to me that the women were badly judged for violating feminine stereotypes and meeting feminine stereotypes. One year, one male received what was meant as a negative comment, "acts feminine."

Although I have expanded on the problems of tokenism for university professors, these women trainees were not tokens, they were women in agraduate program that was 50% female and working in school organizations that are mainly peopled by women. As you know, however, despite the greater number of women educators, women hold only a very small percentage of the administrative posts. Women psychologists in schools are like women in schools. They have less status in contrast to the male psychologists who may be identified with the prevailing male administrator model. The larger issue of sex role

stereotyping seemed too long range and massive a problem to tackle with any hope of improving my students' immediate situations. I thought, however, that we knew enough from research and I had learned enough in my position on the faculty to improvise a training program for the young psychologists.

The training included role plays, simulations and didactic inputs based on the research literature. We made heavy use of videotaping and feedback.

In addition to the personal behavior modification program I began to network with the supervisors. I was hoping that I could improve the students' position with supervisors by increasing my status with supervisors. The connections with supervisors lead to my appointment as a hearing officer. (I never did any "hearing" but I did then hold a high status job in the eyes of district personnel.) Other activities resulted in my appointment to the board of directors of the county ARC, and some appearances on a local station talk show. You would be surprised how easy it is to arrange to be on TV. Also, I began to self-consciously seek out collaboration with like minded people, male and female. Suddenly, I was the untenured member of the promotions and tenure committee and on another powerful publications committee. I attribute my good experiences as the only woman on a psychology faculty to careful application of leadership and organizational principles. I hoped that my positive experiences would help my students. As you know, status is raised by being around high status people. Some positive prominence among peers is very helpful to your students'.

I encouraged the students to take leadership positions at their externship sites. These were mainly heading up committees of some sort. I hoped that the experience in leading would be important and being seen as leader would improve the overall status of the female psychologists.

The training and my own efforts have been proceding for three years. I have been able to compare three groups on evaluation data, self report, requests for psychologists, job placement and technique usage. The change in the women has been very strong. The men are doing even better.

A problem for the women seem to be, "What is an appropriate female power model?" If my modeling characteristics or style were not salient enough for some of the women, they were without another to emulate. The conceptualization of what female power should be is an interesting question. I have just described gaining influence in a male dominated environment using strategies that men use. If I or my female students were to really become powerful, how would we be different from the male models we observe. Some men use power wisely. Most people with power do not. Should women be at the vanguard of establishing a new model of power? Is that delusional thinking? Can an underpowered minority shoulder the burden for coming up with new ways to judiciously use influence. Do we need a new one?

And, how important is personal change. Is promoting the idea of leadership training simply a disguised form of blaming the victim. Maybe not, since men in managerial positions often go for special training in similar skills. However, women who engage

in professional improvement programs, face the added pressure of knowing that many people don't want them to change. "Stay just the way you are." In Texas we say women have trouble in organizations if they are not neat, sweet, and petite.[2] Of course, they have trouble if they are. There are not many neat, sweet, petite corporate managers or full professors.

I think that the personal change component of training is important. I think that guidelines about networking are even more important. Women tend to act less independently not because they are simply more dependent, but because they are in low status positions in their organizations, (some business studies show men to act similarly in similar positions) have been socialized to behave in dependent ways, and are currently interpersonally rewarded for such styles. The new behaviors taught women need to find supportive contexts. This is how networking can help. Such supportive contexts are rare in academic settings and in other educational settings. Tokens will not change the University. Without male allies or a critical mass of women in powerful positions, the efforts of a single one, no matter how dramatic, is unrelated to the large social issue. If you do well, you are called exceptional, and there are "not many more like you." (That's true, there are not lots of exceptional people). If you do badly, it is what was expected all along. Either case makes no progress for women.

The woman in academe must continue to work for her own enhancement and that of her students, both male and female. Did Freud say, "What is it that these women want." I understand his bewilderment.

I want and the women I know want the world to change. We are willing to work toward that change, even while knowing that we cannot do it alone. We want, perhaps, the impossible within our lifetimes.

Footnotes

1. Thank you to Dr. Barbara Presnall for coining this term. Texas Woman's University.
2. Thank you to Dr. Harriet Aronson for the use of that description. North Texas State University.

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